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A L E T T E R

TO THE

CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF EXETER,

ON THE

USE OF THE OFFERTORY,

ESPECIALLY WITH REFERENCE TO THE

MISSIONARY EXERTIONS OF THE CHURCH,

AND TO

THE STATE OF SPIRITUAL DESTITUTION IN THE
MANUFACTURING DISTRICTS OF ENGLAND.

BY

HENRY LORD BISHOP OF EXETER.

L O N D O N :

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

—
1843.

PRICE SIXPENCE.

L E T T E R,

§c. §c.

London, May 12th, 1843.

MY REVEREND BRETHREN,

THE recent appeal from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, and the measure proposed by Government for supplying, however imperfectly, the spiritual destitution which exists in our own land, have determined me to address you on a subject which has long been in my mind, and on which I said a few words to you in my Charge of last year—I mean the revival of the use of the Offertory, as an instrument by which all the members of Christ's Church, within the sphere of our several ministrations, may be invited to offer regularly of their substance to Him from whose bountiful goodness they have received all that they can, in any sense, call their own.

That any Christian, who duly considers the matter, will refuse to recognise the duty of "honouring God with his substance," is not to be supposed. That any who recognise the duty will deliberately refuse to discharge it, is equally incredible. Yet that very few do, in any tolerable degree, discharge it, is as certain as it is to be deplored. Whence

has this arisen? Whose fault is it that one of the very plainest obligations which can be named, is almost universally neglected? Be assured that the fault is and must be, in no small measure, ours. Be assured that no general, habitual disregard of a Christian duty can thus prevail, and have become inveterate, without much of culpable negligence on the part of those who have solemnly pledged themselves, before God and man, to “preach the word; to be instant in season and out of season—to reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine.”

The Church has not been wanting, in this instance more than in others, to us or to our people. It has given us directions which we ought to observe as often as we use any part of the Communion Service, whether the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper be at the same time administered or not.

The Rubric requires that after the sermon, “the priest shall return to the Lord's table, and begin the Offertory, saying one or more of the sentences following”—all taken either from the Holy Scriptures, or from those “other books which the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners.”

“Whilst these sentences are in reading, the deacons, churchwardens, or other fit person appointed for that purpose, shall receive the *alms for the poor*, and *other devotions of the people*.” And “the money given at the Offertory shall be disposed of to such pious and charitable uses as the minister

and churchwardens shall think fit. Wherein if they disagree, it shall be disposed of as the ordinary shall appoint."

It must be here seen that an offering to God is required, as part of our "Common Prayer," on every Lord's Day, or other holy day. Need I remind you how faithfully our truly apostolic Church has in this instance, as in so many others, walked in the footsteps of the holy apostles, on whom, as the foundation, it is built? For how does the great apostle to the Gentiles write on this matter?—"Concerning the collection for the Saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, so do ye." That by "the Saints" is meant Christians in general, "the Household of Faith," I need not say. Their calling is holy, their profession is holy, whatever be the character of their lives. As little can it be necessary to add that the precept is one of universal and perpetual obligation, not limited to the churches of Galatia or Corinth, to whom it was immediately addressed, but applying to all times and to all churches. "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you, according as the Lord hath prospered him, lay by him in store, that there be no gatherings when I come." In other words, on every Lord's Day let every one of you make his weekly offering to the Lord, out of the means which you severally have received from the bounty of God, and in proportion to those means.

Now, I repeat, it is in strict accordance with this

precept of the apostle that our Church has devised that interesting part of our public worship of God, the offering of a fit portion of our substance to Him—to be employed either in ministering to the bodily wants of His afflicted servants, which He is pleased to accept as a ministering to Himself; or in other pious works by which, through His gracious acceptance, His holy name may be exalted, or His kingdom upon earth may be enlarged.

In saying this, I am not ignorant that doubts have been entertained whether the Rubric, by assigning to the churchwardens a right of joint deliberation with the minister in the distribution of the moneys given at the Offertory, do not indicate a limitation of the distribution to objects merely parochial.

To this construction of the Rubric I by no means assent. The phrase, “such pious and charitable uses as the minister and churchwardens shall think fit,” does of itself give a latitude of discretion which may not, in my judgment, be narrowed by anything short of express restriction, or the very plainest and most necessary implication. There is, too, another consideration which seems to me to be of the greatest weight. If the meaning of this Rubric be indeed so confined, our Church has left us without any legitimate mode of obeying the apostle’s precept, by “distributing to the necessity of the Saints,” beyond our own immediate circle.

Now, admirable as our parochial system is, in its

proper order, I should think that it ill merits our commendations if it interfere with one of the plainest duties, and exclude us from one of the highest privileges, of Christians, “the communion of Saints” upon earth. It is a main article of this communion, that the members of the Church of Christ are, as such, linked together in one holy confederation, bound to live in friendly correspondence, and to communicate in works of piety and devotion; above all, to consult for, and to promote, the common interests of the body, and the extension of the Messiah’s kingdom.

The association of the churchwardens with the minister, in this instance, seems to me to indicate a very different and very important purpose. The churchwardens I regard as representatives of the laity of your parishes; and, as such, they are most fitly united with you in this interesting service. So valuable do I esteem their co-operation, and so indisputable their right, that I hope you will not ever make a collection at the Offertory (at no other time are you authorized to make one in church) for any object previously announced, without their consent. The spirit of the Rubric does not justify such a previous announcement, unless with the consent of the churchwardens.

I am the more desirous of impressing these considerations upon you, because I think it may be of the highest service to the Church, that there should be in almost every parish a well-considered and

pre-arranged scheme of objects, for which the collections at the Offertory on the several "Lord's days and other holidays" shall be made. What such scheme in every, or in any, instance, shall be, I have no right, and no wish, to prescribe. Yet I scruple not to subjoin a specimen, which may be imitated, or not, as every one of you shall judge expedient. It has been for some time used by one of your own body, and is now exhibited to you by me, merely as an illustration of my own meaning in what I have now said.

Of the local calls on the munificence of your parishioners, you and your churchwardens will be best able to judge. Of *external* objects, to which a portion of their offerings may fitly be appropriated, there are, I need not say, many. Among them the two, which the occasion of this my address to you especially points out, are of no ordinary interest.

1. The first is the present condition of that Society which, during nearly a century and a half—as long almost as England has had any foreign possessions—has laboured, and, by God's blessing, in various degrees successfully laboured, to supply to them the means of grace.

But it has not limited its work of love to the assistance of our own colonies and factories; from the very first it has extended its efforts to the conversion of the heathens. To all, yet lying in darkness and in the shadow of death, with whom God's Pro-

vidence has in any way connected us, this Society has indefatigably strove to send the heralds of peace and love—"Ambassadors for Christ"—"The servants of the most high God, which shew the way of salvation." It has thus, we humbly hope, more than compensated the many and grievous wrongs which have too often tracked the march whether of our conquests or our commerce.

In the prosecution of this blessed work, the Society has found itself drained of its resources, at the very time when "a great door and effectual is opened unto us," by God's Providence, into an empire more ancient than the oldest monarchy around us—an empire which could boast its high attainments in policy and science when our own forefathers were yet in their woods—covering a region more extensive than all Europe, and containing a population incomparably larger than the whole of Christendom. Shall the blessed opportunity be suffered to pass away? Shall it be lost for want of funds, while there is yet a Church amongst us?

2. But there is another, a more imperious call upon us. It sounds aloud from the very heart of our own country. I speak not of those of our countrymen who hunger and thirst for God's word and ordinances (for their lot, be the want of the means of grace among them what it may, is blessed in comparison with those who mourn not, feel not, know not, their own destitution). No; the loudest, the most imperious call, is heard in the exulting voice

of the infidel and the blasphemer, while he numbers his thousands and hundreds of thousands of adherents among the workmen of our manufactories, those miserable serfs of Mammon who now form so large a portion of the British people.

I will not dwell on the sickening and disgraceful theme. Be it enough to say, while we say it with remorse and shame, that far more than a million of our countrymen,—it may be nearly twice that number,—are abandoned to utter ignorance of all that concerns their souls, by the sinful indifference of the nation to one of its plainest duties. A people blessed, as we are blessed, with free access to the pure word of God, and to all the means of grace—tried, as we are tried, by an affluence of temporal goods, beyond all example in ancient or modern times—has suffered millions of those, whose bodily strength is wasted in labouring to acquire this affluence for us, to live, and, alas ! to die, “without God in the world”—without a knowledge of the Almighty Father who made them, of the Son who redeemed them, of the Holy Ghost who seeks to sanctify and bless them. Mysterious as are the ways of God’s Providence—most mysterious as is that dispensation of goodness (for such we are sure it is) which makes the salvation of men dependent, in so large measure, on the zeal and faithfulness of their fellow-men—yet, in what regards our duty, is no mystery; here all is plain. We must—if we are indeed and in truth members of Christ—we must show, that

we know and feel, that we are also “members one of another,”—that “if one member suffer, the whole body suffers with it.”

Apply this great Christian truth to the present disordered state of things amongst us; and then let us strive, with God’s blessing, to perform our part in redressing it. Our people, we cannot doubt (if only they are made to know the truth), will be ready and glad to join in any well-considered course which can lead to such an end. Now, in the ordinance which the pious wisdom of those who compiled the Liturgy has provided—in the Offertory, to be used whenever the Communion office is used—we have a ready machinery by which the Church can collect the means, not only of almsgiving, but also of supporting all its necessary institutions, whether for Christian education, or for evangelizing the heathens of the East or West, or for supplying our own colonies with such spiritual assistance as a Christian government may think itself justified in leaving to be supplied by the voluntary efforts of individuals—or, above and before all, for clearing away the worse than heathen darkness which covers so large a portion of our own land. Had this ordinance always been made efficient, and had we kept alive a due sense of our common interest in the common weal of Christ’s body, we should long ago have seen a house of God erected, a minister of God planted, within the reach of every section of our teeming population as it arose. We should not have at once

to blush and to tremble at the sight of that hideous and portentous evil, which the selfish avarice of a few, it may be, has engendered, but which the no less selfish indolence and indifference of the many have suffered to grow to its present appalling magnitude.

Thank God, it is not yet too late to betake ourselves to a better course. Let us, my Reverend Brethren, set forth zealously, though soberly, the whole scheme of Christian action, which the constitution, and ordinances, and Liturgy of our Church supply. Truly and wisely has it been said by one of its living ornaments, that, "Until the Church's intentions are fully carried out, as to her ritual, we do not know what the Church really is, or is capable of doing." *

To a revival of one, and not the least effectual (under God's blessing) of all its means of spiritual and temporal usefulness, I now invite you. But in order that it may be indeed effectual, teach your people to know and feel what the Offertory was designed to be—a means of discharging one of the most sacred duties, and of exercising, I had almost said, the highest privilege of Christians—the duty and the privilege of "giving to God of his own." Teach them that this is a duty, which is alike bound on the conscience of all to perform—a privilege, which is alike and equally within the ability

* Bishop of London's Charge, 1842.

of all to exercise—that the poorest can give to God as much as the richest, if he give from the heart.

In truth, it is among the most obvious, as well as greatest benefits of such an usage, that it tends largely to excite and to invigorate the feelings which most become a Christian. It makes every worshipper of Christ feel that the love of man—evinced in providing for the spiritual as well as temporal wants of man—is a necessary accompaniment of the worship of God, if that worship be “in spirit and in truth.” It gives an opportunity of strengthening this feeling, by at once acting on it, free from the alloy of worldly motive—of vanity and ostentation; thus directly fulfilling St. Paul’s direction—“He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity.”

It is, besides, continually recurring, continually, therefore, impressing on us the lesson—which cannot be impressed too deeply—“Freely ye have received, freely give.”

It accords, too, with that sobermindedness which the Apostle was at all times anxious to inculcate on those to whom he wrote; knowing that their very piety, much more their “liberality,” is too apt to degenerate into heat and intemperance. It fosters not, in short,—no, nor does it admit,—any of that unholy excitement which the bustle and tumult of meetings, and consultations, and advocatings of the best and holiest causes can scarcely fail to create.

It enables almost every man among us to bear his part in the common concerns of the Church, and thus makes him *feel* that he is a churchman—feel, that church-membership is not merely a profession, but a bond of union, and a principle of united action.

As a mode of almsgiving, it will supply a fund, by which many of the most distressing cases under the operation (whether necessary or not) of the New Poor Law may be relieved. It will thus assist in preserving the *parochial* connexion of our people, and in keeping alive the precious sympathies of neighbourhood, which it is the undeniable tendency of this Law (whatever compensation it may carry with it) to destroy.

Such, my Reverend Brethren, are some of the results to which we may venture to look forwards from a recurrence to this too long neglected ordinance.

True it is, we may not reasonably hope for all these results at once. In most instances, it will be necessary to prepare your people for the duty to which you call them; and, prepare them as you may, there will still be many who will decry the renewed ordinance as an innovation—perhaps stigmatise it with some term of reproach. But persist in it calmly, meekly, patiently. The manifest holiness and usefulness of such a practice will, ere it be long, shame the gainsayer, and silence those whom they may fail to win.

A more formidable objection seems to arise from the time, at which this revival is proposed. It will be said, that, when the greater number of yourselves and your parishioners are suffering from the difficulties of the times, and from the shock which has been given to every branch of commercial and agricultural industry, it is not a season for proposing new modes of raising funds from charity.

To this it may be answered, that, in whatever measure or degree these difficulties are a reason against making offerings to God, in the same measure and degree, and in no greater, they are an objection to that mode of making those offerings which the Church has prescribed. Now, can any serious man, much less any faithful Christian, say that such are the necessities of the day, that the people at large have no funds beyond those which mere necessities demand?—that they have nothing left for honouring God, in the relief of their afflicted brethren? I stop not for the answer.

It is more to our purpose to remark, that the measure which I now commend to you is peculiarly fitted for a time of impaired general prosperity; for at such a time large donations are, indeed, commonly inconvenient: but this expedient would substitute small, frequent, regularly recurring offerings, to be enlarged or contracted, as our several circumstances may vary from one brief period to another. Yet the result will be far more advantageous, even to the objects for which the weekly

offering is made, than from greater efforts exerted more rarely. The amount will be incalculably greater; and, what is no light consideration, the regularity and certainty of the supply will give that confidence and security which are indispensable to the good administration of all such institutions.

For all these reasons, but above all because it is enjoined by the Church, and therefore we may hope well-pleasing to God, I invite you, each in his several charge, and under the guidance of Christian discretion, above all, with humble and earnest prayer, to strive to revive the use of the Offertory on every occasion when the Communion service shall be used. May God of his goodness accept and bless your endeavour! May He make this revival minister to the best interests of your own flocks, and of the Church at large!

Believe me, my Reverend Brethren,

Your affectionate friend and servant,

H. EXETER.

The Offertory.

DEARLY BELOVED IN THE LORD,

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN ENGLAND directs that after the Sermon, “ *the Priest shall return to the Lord’s Table,*” and “ *whilst reading one or more sentences*” (taken out of “THE BOOK OF THE LORD,” and given in the “Book of Common Prayer,”) “ *the Deacons, Churchwardens, or other fit Person appointed for that purpose, shall receive the Alms for the Poor, and other devotions of the people, in a decent basin to be provided by the Parish for that purpose ; and reverently bring it to the Priest, who shall humbly present and place it upon the holy Table.*”

The Scriptural authority for this order is contained in these words of St. Paul to the members of the Church of Christ in Corinth : “ Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the Churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him, that there be *no gatherings* when I come.” See *St. Paul’s first Epistle to the Corinthians, 16th chapter, 1st and 2nd verses.*

The Offerings made to the Lord on HIS OWN DAY, and in HIS OWN HOUSE, at Saint Mewan, during the year of our Lord 1843, will be appropriated as follows :—

On the first Sunday in the Month, to the support of the Sunday School ;

On the second Sunday in Lent, (March 12th,)* The Society for promoting the Enlargement, Building, and Repairing of Churches ;

On Trinity Sunday, (June 11th,)* The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts ;

On the fifteenth Sunday after Trinity, (September 24th,)* The Additional Curates' Society ;

On the fourth Sunday in Advent, (December 24th,)* The Clothing Club for the Children of the Sunday School ;

On all other Sundays, to the relief of "*the sick and needy*" *Members* of THE CHURCH in Saint Mewan.

" Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest " the following passages that you will find " written in the volume of THE BOOK." " Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him ? " 1 St. John iii. 17. " As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, *especially unto them who are of* THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH." Galatians vi. 10. " I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE." Acts xx. 35. " And THE KING shall answer and say unto them, verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto ME." St. Matthew xxv. 40. " Every man according *as he purposeth in his heart*, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a *cheerful* giver." 2 Corinthians ix. 7.

* The four Sundays immediately following the **Ember Fast**s; and set apart by THE CHURCH for conferring the great honour and dignity of HOLY ORDERS. See the 31st Canon of the Church; and read Nelson's Companion for the Festivals and Fasts.

And REMEMBER, “all things come of Him, and of HIS OWN do we give Him.” I Chronicles xxix. 14.

Brethren, “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.”

R. T. WILSON TAYLOR, B.A.,

RECTOR.

St. Mewan, 1843.

We, the undersigned, being the Churchwardens of the Parish of Saint Mewan, consent that “the money given at the Offertory shall be disposed of” in the aforesaid manner.

JAMES ANDREW, }
GEORGE ANDREW, } Churchwardens.

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